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WATER CONTAMINATION PROBLEM IN ST. LOUIS PARK

On October 13, 1978 the Minnesota Department of Health released a report entitled "Health Implications of Polynuclear Aromatic Hydrocarbons in St. Louis Park Drinking Water". At the same time a press release was made on this subject. Many residents of St. Louis Park will become alarmed over the next few days when they hear the discussions about the City's drinking water. The following questions and answers are offered for you to use in handling questions over the telephone or in person. If the person becomes particularly vehement in their questioning, please refer them to the Public Works Division, the Director of Public Works or the Water and Sewer Supt., Ext. 35 and 40 respectively.

Q - Is the water supplied to my property safe to drink?

A - Yes. The wells that have been considered to be contaminated are not in operation at this time. Until further notice, the wells will not be placed in operation. The remaining wells that the City draws its water from have been tested by the Minnesota State Department of Health and deemed safe for drinking water and other consumption purposes.

Q - With the closing of the four wells, where will the City get their water from?

A - The City's water system is an integrated distribution pipeline serving all of the areas of St. Louis Park. Fourteen wells serve the residents of St. Louis Park within the water distribution system. Four wells have been identified as being contaminated with PAH compounds. These wells are Well No. 7, 9, 10 and 15. The combined total of water produced by the four wells during the year from November 1 of 1977 through October 31 of 1978 is approximately 9% of the total water produced in St. Louis Park. It is relatively easy to use other wells in place of the four wells in question. In fact, pumping from the four wells has been almost non-existent over the last two and one-half months. Only Well No. 15 has been used to any extent. Normally these wells are primarily needed during the high water usage months of the summer.

Q - Is it necessary to use bottled water and will the City provide the water for the residents?

A - It is not necessary to use bottled water and the City has no plans to provide bottled water for any of the residents.

Q - Which residents of the City were drinking the contaminated water?

A - The City's water system is an integrated, looped network of pipes. Thus, water from a well in the south part of the City can be used for water producing purposes in the north and central portions of the City. It is not possible to determine precisely the proportion of water used by a certain population in the City from the so called contaminated wells. The dilution effects of the looped water distribution system should reduce the PAH contamination elements below that which the Minnesota Department of Health has suggested. Their studies were directly from the well tap and not from the distribution system.

Q - Why haven't the State Health Department officials and the City officials detected the contamination problem previously?

A - New detection equipment and scientific methodology has allowed the Health Department medical personnel to test water in areas heretofore thought impossible. Detection limits of carcinogens in the water supply were not approachable previous to 1978. At this time, the Health Department is working on more elaborate tests that will enable them to further study the contamination extent and determine the long term health implications.

Q - What are PAH compounds?

A - PAH compounds occur in our everyday life in many different forms. Some PAH compounds, which stands for Polynuclear Aromatic Hydrocarbons, occur in air borne particles, others occur in normal diets for each person. PAH in food occurs in natural forms in many different types of food. For example, smoked fish and other smoked foods has a high incidence of PAH compounds. Roasted coffee also contains PAH materials. Perhaps the most important source of dietary PAH compounds in the United States is charcoal broiled meats. Making various assumptions about the population of St. Louis Park, the contamination levels in the water supply are less than an average person consuming approximately 60 grams of barbecued steak per day, 16 grams of coffee per day, and about 1200 grams of other solid foods per day that contain PAH compounds. An analogy of this problem would be the saccharin contained in the dietary soft drinks or smoking cigarettes.

Q - Are you pumping water directly from the former Republic Creosote operation site?

A - No. There are no City wells located on the former Republic Creosote site now known as Oak Park Village. There are a couple of abandoned wells that are not used for any pumping purposes.

Q - What is the City and the Health Department doing about the contamination problem?

A - The State Legislature in 1978 appropriated approximately \$200,000 to the Minnesota Department of Health to study the contamination problem further. The United States Geological Survey Agency, a federal agency, has been contracted by the Department of Health to do a complete geological and hydrological survey of the area. The study is expected to take approximately two years to complete. At the completion of the study solutions to the problem hopefully will be available. Presently the City is working with the Health Department staff to study alternatives which will allow the City to maintain the needed capacity of their water supply during peak water usage periods. Fortunately, these peak periods will not occur again until next spring and summer.

Q - Will we become sick from using the City water supply?

A - No. The contamination found in the wells may cause illness over a long period of time if the person has used the water to a substantial degree. No evidence has been found as to what level of water usage will produce sickness in a person using the water supply with the level of PAH compounds that the City's water supply has. In fact, no standards are available in the United States for these carcinogenic compounds. The State Department of Health used standards that are the guidelines of the World Health Organization and the Commission of European Communities. Only two of the four St. Louis Park wells exceeded these guidelines and then only by a small amount. If the resident wishes to discuss the long term implications of drinking water with PAH compounds in it, he or she should call David Gray, an official with the Minnesota State Department of Health in the Health Risk Assessment Department. His telephone number is 296-5352.